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## Backstory: Decades-old cold case looking for smallest break in exhibiting sculpture

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A sculpture has been crafted from the skull involving a cold case that is part of an exhibit at the Delaware State Police Museum in Dover. / JENNIFER CORBETT/The News Journal

A state museum exhibit could help solve a crime mystery that has endured nearly two decades, the curator says.

The exhibit, located at the the Delaware State Police Museum and Educational Center along DuPont Highway in Dover, tells how forensic artists create faces of unidentified remains.

The display – with an eye-catching skull – features a model that artist Frank Bender created in 1994 of an unidentified man whose remains were found the previous year. As time passes, the exhibit could lead to an identification.

“Maybe someday, someone will walk in here and go, ‘I know who that is,’ or ‘That’s my uncle,’ ” said curator John R. Alstadt Jr.

He acknowledges that’s a longshot, but also knows cases can get cracked by the smallest of breaks.

The retired state trooper – an author whose books include a history of the force and the story of Delaware’s infamous “Poison Candy Murder Case” in 1898 – says, “You never know.”

When Bender rendered the face, starting with a combining artistic talent with scientific data: “Using facial formulas, the artist can, with good luck, figure out who he was and how he died,” it says.

The mystery has yet to unravel for the remains found Sept. 13, 1993, off Marsh Road near I-95 in Brandywine Hundred.

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A lost motorist from Baltimore pulled over to check a map, noticed an odor and made the grisly discovery, according to News Journal files.

Investigators found no fingerprint matches in state or national databases, nor was the victim found in missing person reports.

But Alstadt said someone still could recognize the unidentified man.

He was 20 to 35 years old, about 5-foot-10, 120-140 pounds and of Asian, American Indian or Eskimo ethnicity with black hair

down to his collar or shoulders. The tip of his right ring finger was surgically amputated.

He wore a Ralph Lauren T-shirt, tan Bugle Boy pants that were size 28 medium and tan leather-like shoes with rubber soles.

A seven-digit number was written in one shoe, possibly the former phone number of a Domino's Pizza in Brick, N.J.

His left pinkie finger had an extra long nail. Police did not determine its significance, but said such nails are associated with drug use as well as Asian royalty.

The teeth were perfect – no cavities or fillings – but they showed the man was a heavy smoker.

Unless a victim is identified, "it's virtually impossible to find the killer," an old News Journal article in the display quotes Robert Coupe as saying.

At that time, Coupe was a detective on the case. But he, too, has become part of our law enforcement history, having recently retired as superintendent of Delaware State Police.

**Do you have a Delaware Backstory? Tell robin brown at 324-2856, [rbrown@delawareonline.com](mailto:rbrown@delawareonline.com) or The News Journal, Box 15505, Wilmington, Del., 19850.**

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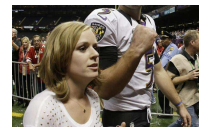
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